OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER SAM JOHNSON
WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY
AND TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
JOINT HEARING ON THE PROGRESS MADE TO REPLACE
THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION'S NATIONAL COMPUTER CENTER
DECEMBER 15, 2009

(REMARKS AS PREPARED)

Mr. Chairman, Madame Chair,

I want to thank you for holding this important hearing. But before I turn to this hearing's subject, and in light of the Social Security Subcommittee Chairman's recent retirement announcement, I want to take advantage of this opportunity to personally acknowledge and thank the Chairman for his long and distinguished service to this nation.

Mr. Chairman, the American people have truly benefited from your leadership, and I am proud to call you a good friend.

With about a year to go I very much look forward to working with you here on the Subcommittee. Thank you again for all that you have done. God bless you.

Turning to the focus of today's hearing, Social Security is at a critical crossroads. While this hearing may seem rather technical in nature, at heart it is about Social Security being able to operate day in and day out for the American people.

As our population ages, more workers and retirees are depending on Social Security's essential benefits and services that they paid for through their hard earned wages.

Social Security's ability to deliver those services depends on its use of modern, secure technology that they and the American people can rely on. Yet Social Security's 30-year old National Computer Center that allows the agency to process applications, pay benefits and store secure data on most U.S. workers is on its last legs. That's why Congress has given Social Security $500 million to build a new, 21st Century center.

In the meantime however, should the current Center fail, Social Security's recovery plan falls short. Currently it would take a week to restart only some of the system's operations, and even then Social Security will only be operating at a third of its current level.

-OVER-

Social Security reports it is making progress on plans to fully restore service delivery and protect Americans' personal information in the event of a major failure by bringing on line its backup data center in North Carolina early next year.

I look forward to hearing from Social Security in terms of what it is doing to ensure that there is minimal disruption in service to the American people in the event of a system failure and the progress it is making to bring its North Carolina center on line.

In the longer term, replacing Social Security's outdated National Computer Center with its new Support Center is critical to maintaining and improving service delivery. With taxpayers investing $500 million in this project, they rightfully deserve to expect that their investment is being used to build this new Center on time and within budget.

I thank the witnesses for joining us today and presenting their expert testimony.

###